***Whole Earth* review Meeting Summary**
Prepared by David Bolling

What follows is a summary of the discussion among *Whole Earth* reviewers, led by Ted Knodel, at the Falkirk Mansion on March 5, 2002. Some redundant points have been condensed and the order of material has been somewhat rearranged for easier review. Otherwise, this is a record of what was said. Full list of participants appears at end.

- **Executive Summary**

The conclusions drawn from this four-hour exercise were neither surprising nor particularly revelatory. Rather they affirmed assumptions, intuitions and understandings most of us already shared. The discussion revealed that all of us view *Whole Earth* as a vital, often visionary voice with an important heritage and tradition that has nevertheless failed to address changing market realities and has practiced few, if any, conventional magazine marketing strategies.

We affirmed that for most of *Whole Earth's* history, decisions about change have been driven almost exclusively by vision and values, not by the market. In most publications, market considerations play a much greater role. Partly as a result, *Whole Earth* has steadily lost market share and readership, and operates at a substantial deficit.

- We identified among *Whole Earth's* key strengths a high level of reader loyalty and sense of community. Readers feel themselves to be in dialogue with and participants in *Whole Earth.*

- Cutting edge content on "new stuff I don't know," reviews of books and tools readers otherwise might miss, and an eclectic mix of subject matter on issues important to the future of the planet, make *Whole Earth* important to the review participants and, by extension, to our readers.

- The magazine's major weaknesses include its financial instability and an internal culture that has failed to change and innovate. There has been

virtually no marketing of the magazine, and planning (with some periodic exceptions) has usually been short-term or non-existent. The magazine needs to remain mission-driven while becoming more market sensitive.

- Additionally, the design is seen as static, cluttered and dated, and content organization is confusing. More white space and full-run color are needed, as is better sign-posting, an improved TOC and other navigational aids. Content is viewed as being too "white male."

- There was general agreement that the Whole Earth vision needs to be clearly understood and articulated in a few words.

- Asked to express their visions for *Whole Earth's* future (as expressed in fantasy headlines from the *New York Times*), participants described a magazine that was solidly in the black, with a circulation of 300,000 (with 50,000 foreign readers in 9 languages), 20 percent advertising content and a website with 2 million hits. Whole Earth had become the "preeminent purveyor of social and cultural change," translating the sustainable future and achieving the position of "number-one read" for change makers.

- A key part of the discussion involved identifying the core values that have shaped *Whole Earth's* past and which should guide it's future change and growth. Those values included sustainability, self-sufficiency, activism, connectedness (or interconnectedness), understanding change and innovation, making a difference, being an early adopter.

- It was agreed that the core values shaping *Whole Earth's* past are appropriate and relevant for its future, if adapted to a broader and younger demographic audience. It was agreed that the *Whole Earth* of the future needs to embrace and reflect its historic values but in an updated context, making them appealing and accessible to a more diverse readership.

- Asked to describe their comfort level with changing *Whole Earth* (i.e. how much change are you comfortable with?) on a scale of 1-10, the average comfort index for participants was 7. Participants than projected their assumptions for the change comfort of readers: the average value was 5.5.

II. Verbatim Record of Discussion Findings

1. Whole Earth Strengths and Weaknesses

A. Strengths

- Huge reader loyalty
- Sense of Community, readers and writers are kindred spirits
- Dialog between writers and readers helps shape content
- Informal tone of some of the writing builds reader loyalty
- Legacy of Whole Earth Catalogs
- Contains "New stuff that I don't know"
- Historic, cutting edge content – national leader in revealing new paradigms, publishing new voices
- Chain of contributors has many prominent names
- Name recognition/Well known brand
- Eclectic Content interests diverse range of readers
- Themed content provides in-depth coverage
- Reviews give access to wide range of books
- Institutional memory contains access to 30 years of innovation and change
- Consistency of approach through the years
- Strong personality and strong perspective as expressed through voice and attitude
- Opinion neutral content allows diversity of opinion
- Written by intelligent people who care about the subject matter
- Dense Read, intellectually challenging

B. Weaknesses

- Financial Instability
- Held back from innovation through lack of resources and internal culture
- Hasn't kept up with publishing technology
- No marketing strategy, no marketing, period!

- Undefined vision, needs to be clearly understood and stated in few words
- Short-term thinking and operations, need to plan and act long-term
- Limited funds limits design
- Internal graphic design is static, cluttered and dated
- Design needs more cartoons, photos and white space
- Black and white design is limiting, needs full color
- Opinion neutral publication is frustrating
- Dense read, makes readers work too hard
- Too Green? Could limit readership.
- Not Green enough – Need for "inspirational Earth worship" content
- Small Board
- Small Staff
- Small pool of writers, need fresh blood
- Content is too white male
- Content lack humor
- Lack of strong writer personality – Needs more personal experience content, needs first-person columns
- No travel section
- Lack of pro-consumer activist viewpoints, needs to take stands
- Burdened by the perceived need to always be cutting edge
- Lack of continuity can be jarring
- Appeals to "Their Generation" readers – needs to reach newer, younger audience
- No Other Supporting activities (Books, Events, Conferences)
- Lack of Collaboration with other Organizations

2. Visions for the Future

(Expressed as fantasy headlines in the *New York Times* five years from now)

- Amazing Turn Around
- Whole Earth Profitable
- Completely Stable Business: Donations Support Special Projects
- Point Foundation Underwrites Sustainable Activities
- Four Years into the Black, Whole Earth Increases Readership to 300K
- Whole Earth Achieves 20% Advertising pages Without Compromising Content

- Whole Earth Markets Multiple Businesses: Books, Products, Newsletters, Conferences, Film/TV/Radio, Great Thinkers Series
- Whole Earth Website Reports 2 Million Hits
- Whole Earth International Circulation Reaches 50,000, Published in 9 Languages
- Whole Earth Becomes The Business Model for Social Change
- Whole Earth Reading Clubs Proliferate
- Whole Earth Fosters Conscious Corporate Change
- Whole Earth Inspires Responsible Investing
- Whole Earth: The Quotable Media Organization
- Whole Earth is the Thought Leader for its Issues
- Whole Earth Responsible for Tangible Outcomes on Issues it Supports
- Whole Earth is Preeminent Purveyor of Social & Cultural Change
- Miracle of Publishing: WE Leads the Wave of Cultural Change
- Change Makers' Number One Read
- Whole Earth Translates Sustainable Future
- The Whole Earth Sustainability Catalog for Gen X & Y
- Whole Earth Profiles the 20 Most Influential Sustainable Businesses Worldwide
- Whole Earth First to Publish 15 Important New Authors
- Whole Earth Uses Global Team of correspondents
- Whole Earth Enjoys Broad International Readership
- Whole Earth Writers Reap Industry Awards
- Whole Earth has Intelligently Competent Young Leadership
- Whole Earth Has New Table of Contents: Family & Society, Technology, Entertainment & Media, Indie Music, Travel, Education, Business, Gossip (People to watch), Weird Things, Good Stories
- Whole Earth Introduces Defined Editorial Sections
- Whole Earth Has Fresh Voices
- Whole Earth is Relevant to Youth
- Whole Earth is Uninhibited
- Whole Earth is Non-P.C.
- Personal Voices Expanded in Whole Earth
- Whole Earth Takes Dialog Beyond the Core: Not the Usual Sources
- Whole Earth is Provocative
- Whole Earth is More Expressive
- Whole Earth Goads Me - Pisses Me Off!
- Whole Earth Provides Different Entry Points for Reader
- Whole Earth is Fun to Read

- Whole Earth Expresses/Generates Enthusiasm
- Whole Earth is About Enthusiastic Inquiry
- Whole Earth Provides Ruthless Curiosity
- Whole Earth Provides Socratic Learning
- Whole Earth Promotes Inclusion & Inter-Dependence
- Whole Earth is Reinvented
- Whole Earth is in Color

3. Values Exercise

What values shaped Whole Earth's past and what values are needed to shape the future?

A. Values that Shaped Whole Earth's Past

- Activism
- Sustainability
- Social Consciousness
- Interrelationships
- Community
- Global Reach
- Understanding Change, Innovation in Society
- Desire to Make Change, to Make a Difference
- Being Futurists, Early Adopters, Knowing in Advance
- Self Sufficiency: Do-It-Yourself Skills and Knowledge
- Adaptation Focused, Resourceful
- Civic Capacity: Interest in Contributing to Civic Services and Resources
- Alternative Consumption: Cool, Green, Useful, Quality
- "I Was Raised With It." (Identity Level)
- Having News You Can Use (Self & Lifestyle Improvement)

B. Values that Will Shape the Future

All the past values are relevant to and will shape Whole Earth's future if they are adapted to embrace and address women, kids, ethnicity and the emerging social, political, economic, environmental and spiritual issues of the 21st Century. They must also be adapted to the current market, which is to say they must translate issues like sustainability and alternative consumption not just to a white, male readership in its 50s, but to a new and younger demographic.

4. Whole Earth Change Comfort Index

On a 1-10 scale, the comfort level for change

A. Staff/supporters/advisors change comfort index

1 at 5, 1 at 6, 5 at 7, 1 at 8, 1 at 9. **Average: 7**

B. Readers change comfort index, as predicted by staff

1 at 3, 2 at 4, 2 at 5, 1 at 6, 1 at 7, 2 at 8. **Average: 5.5**

Participants: David Bolling, WE Publisher; Mike Stone, WE Managing Editor; Emily Polk, WE Associate Editor; Stefan Guthermuth, WE designer; Stephanie Guyer-Stevens, WE development director; Danica Remy, Point Foundation President; Peter B. Collins, media consultant; Jerry Kay, Editor, Earth News Radio, Science Interchange, ENN; Chris Clarke, founder/editor Faultline; Peter Lavigne, President, Rivers Foundation of the Americas; Gary Bolles, Editorial Director Interactive Enterprises (Ziff-Davis).